

# UNDERSTANDING THE THEOLOGY OF REVELATION

2.21.07

WEEK 1 – READING REVELATION

## MY HOPES FOR THIS CLASS

### **1. To give you a framework to be able to better read and understand Revelation on your own**

We will not answer every question that you have about Revelation, but hopefully will give you some better questions to be asking, and a framework for how to think about those questions

### **2. To help you look at Revelation theologically, instead of as a timeline**

This is how I believe Revelation is meant to be understood, and how the first audience would have understood it. Depending on your background of your understanding of Revelation, this may be one of the most stretching aspects of this course for you. Many questions that you have may not be able to be answered because they need to be reframed because they are questions based on looking at Revelation as a timeline.

### **3. To help you think about and understand what Revelation means to you today...not just the past and not just in the future**

This is often one of the most negated aspects of the study of Revelation, but it is the most rewarding

- What are some of your expectations/ what are you hoping to get out of this?

## WHAT I'M ASKING FROM YOU

### **1. A commitment to the process**

It takes work to understand Revelation. I've put in months of work already into this class and will continue each week to put in a lot of work into it. Because of that, I recognize that the best way to get something out of this is not to be spoon-fed information, but to process stuff on your own. So, will you...

- Ask questions during the class
- Think about the material during the week, and bring questions that are raised during the week to the class
- Bring a Bible with you each week. If you don't own one, I have one that we'd love to give you. I will normally use the TNIV, and may at times reference the ESV, but you should bring whatever you're comfortable and familiar with
- Read Revelation at least once all the way through during these 6 weeks (That's about 1 chapter every other day if you want to take it slow...)
- As much as you are able, make it a priority to be here

- Realize that we may not get through everything each week, and that's ok. We'll pick up where we left off the next week. And some weeks we may not have enough to fill up the time, and that's ok too

## **2. A humility when it comes to how you've already understood Revelation**

Revelation is one of the most diversely interpreted books of the Bible. I know that I do not have the corner on understanding it, but I have processed in a scholarly way most of the major understandings of Revelation and come to a conclusion based on that study. It is very possible that's different than how you've understood Revelation previously. Our understanding of Revelation is not a salvation issue, and is not an essential to our faith. Therefore, we should hold our understanding of it both tightly and loosely at the same time. You don't have to agree with me at the end of this class, but at least recognize that different viewpoints on Revelation have something to offer each other.

## **3. Interact with me and each other**

I can get going sometimes when I get teaching. Please stop me when something doesn't make sense, or when it raises a question in your mind. Although this will be a large class, I hope that we can still find a way to make it somewhat interactive. You have something to contribute, so please also interact during our group discussion times. Let's make a commitment to each other that none of us can look stupid

### **Group Discussion:**

Meet 4 or 5 people sitting around you, find out each other's names, and discuss each of your previous experiences with Revelation

- e.g. Never read it before; have tried, but couldn't get it; have studied it extensively; I read my 'Left Behind' devotional every morning, etc...

## **PRINCIPLES FOR INTERPRETING AND READING REVELATION**

### **1. It needs to mean something to its original audience before it can mean anything to us**

Revelation 1:1

*"The reason one must not begin with the here and now is that the only proper control for hermeneutics [the interpretation of Scripture] is to be found in the original intent of the biblical text."*

~ How to Read the Bible for All It's Worth

*"One of the most fundamental mistakes many commentators make in understanding the book of Revelation is forgetting that the book would have made sense to its original audience."*

~ Mike Erre, The Jesus of Suburbia

### **2. Revelation needs to build on a consistent New Testament theology**

What is the tension/balance of these passages?

1 Corinthians 3:16-17 and Revelation 11:1

2 Peter 3:8 and Revelation 20:2-3

### **3. We have to understand the allusions and references to the Old Testament**

There are 404 verses in Revelation and in those, there are 518 references to earlier Scripture

*"If we are not familiar with the preceding writings, quite obviously we are not going to understand the Revelation."*

~Eugene Peterson, *Reversed Thunder*

### **4. We have to understand the genres in which it is written**

*"Misinterpretations of Revelation often begin by misconceiving the kind of book it is."*

~ The Theology of Revelation, Richard Bauckham

#### **Apocalyptic**

Revelation 1:1

revelation = *apokalypsis*

*"Apocalypses in general, and the Revelation in particular, seldom intend to give a detailed, chronological account of the future."*

~ *How to Read the Bible for All It's Worth*

*"You approach apocalyptic literature differently than you would a letter or one of the Gospels. In Revelation words take the place of pigments and brushes to create a portrait designed to visualize great principles, not particular incidents. Resisting the temptation to dissect the portrait described in each vision, you let the vision as a whole impress you."*

~ Sam Hamstra, *Four Views on the Book of Revelation*

#### **Prophecy**

Revelation 1:3

#### **Letter**

Revelation 1:4-6, 11

The entire book is a circular letter, not just chapters 2-3

## **Group Discussion:**

Take 5 minutes to read this poem in a group of 4 or 5 and talk briefly about what you believe it means

*Because I could not stop for Death –  
He kindly stopped for me –  
The Carriage held but just Ourselves –  
And Immortality.*

*We slowly drove – He knew no haste  
And I had put away  
My labor and my leisure too,  
For His Civility –*

*We passed the School, where Children strove  
At Recess – in the Ring –  
We passed the Fields of Gazing Grain –  
We passed the Setting Sun –*

*Or rather – He passed us –  
The Dews drew quivering and chill –  
For only Gossamer, my Gown –  
My Tippet – only Tulle –*

*We paused before a House that seemed  
A Swelling of the Ground –  
The Roof was scarcely visible –  
The Cornice – in the Ground –*

*Since then – 'tis Centuries – and yet  
Feels shorter than the Day  
I first surmised the Horses' Heads  
Were toward Eternity –*

~Because I Could Not Stop for Death by Emily Dickinson

## **5. Looking at Revelation “zoomed-out” rather than “zoomed-in”**

*“If the Revelation is not read as a poem, it is simply incomprehensible. The inability (or refusal) to deal with St. John, the poet, is responsible for most of the misreading, misinterpretation, and misuse of the book...We do not have more information after we read a poem, we have more experience.”*

~ Eugene Peterson, *Reversed Thunder*

*“Revelation deals in images which cannot say everything at once”*

~ The Theology of the Book of Revelation, Richard Bauckham

Luke 15:22-24

## **6. We need to understand the imagery used throughout Revelation**

*“Misunderstandings of the nature of the imagery and the way it conveys meaning account for many misinterpretations of Revelation.”*

~Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*

How is that same imagery used in the Hebrew Scriptures, how was it used in the New Testament?

(this is some of what we looked at during #2 above)

How is imagery in general used throughout the Scriptures?

Isaiah 19:1

John 6:53

How is that imagery used in other places of John's writing and how is it used in other places in Revelation?

Compare John 1:29 and Revelation 5:6

Compare Revelation 1:20 and 11:3-4

How would that imagery have been understood by the original audience?

This takes a huge amount of work to do really well. Unless you are willing to do an incredible amount of research through first century sources, the resources that I've suggested on another sheet should help you in that direction. Also, this is some of what we'll look at during these 6 weeks.

## **UNDERSTANDING THE THEOLOGY OF REVELATION VS STUDYING IT VERSE BY VERSE**

- 1. We're looking at overarching pictures, rather than getting lost in the details**
- 2. Understanding this first, gives you the ability to read it better on your own, and to go through verse by verse if you choose**